

Multiple arrests in international drug trafficking and money laundering ring

05 July 2017

Today, in an international joint action day in Italy, Spain and Germany, 33 people were arrested, suspected of involvement in drug trafficking, participation in a criminal organisation and money laundering. The action day was the culmination of complex investigations, led by the Italian *Direzione Distrettuale Antimafia ed Antiterrorismo* of Naples and the Spanish *Audiencia Nacional and Fiscalia Especial Anticorrupcion y Contra la Criminalidad Organizada*, with the support of Eurojust. The Italian *Procura Nazionale Antimafia ed Antiterrorismo* was involved as well, in its role as coordinating body for the investigations at Italian level and as Eurojust national correspondent.

Eurojust ensured proper coordination at EU level of the national investigations, and full legal and operational assistance to all national authorities involved. Today, Eurojust set up a coordination centre at its premises in The Hague to coordinate the joint execution of the arrests, searches and seizures in Italy, Spain and Germany and to facilitate the real-time exchange of information among all judicial and law enforcement officials involved in the joint operations.

The case was referred to Eurojust by the Anti-Mafia Prosecution Office in Naples in 2016 for assistance in judicial cooperation, following an Italian investigation commencing at the end of 2015 after a drug seizure. An exchange of information facilitated by Europol clarified links to a Spanish organised criminal group (OCG) involved, among other criminal activities, in extortion, money laundering and transporting large quantities of cocaine and hashish from Spain to Italy.

To avoid interception, the OCG communicated via electronic means (Skype, Whatsapp and Viber) and encrypted mobile telephones. The drug proceeds were laundered via reinvestment in catering, food import and export, trade in precious metals and vehicles, and football. As a result of today's action, EUR 5 million and hundreds of kilos of drugs were seized in Italy, Spain and Germany. The OCG also had bank accounts in several offshore tax havens.

To assist the competent authorities in carrying out parallel investigations in this complex case, a joint investigation team (JIT) was signed between Italy and Spain in October 2016, funded and supported by Eurojust. This JIT was the first ever signed by Italy, after a change in its national legislation in March 2016. The speed of the progress achieved after the signing of the JIT is striking compared to the lengthy time previously required by traditional mutual legal assistance procedures. The JIT was extended in time to cover the joint action.

A coordination meeting took place in January 2017 to exchange operational

information and adopt a common strategy, including a decision on the joint action day and how to avoid conflicts of jurisdiction. Operational meetings also took place at Europol, in Spain and in Italy. Europol employed a mobile office on the action day, and officers were present in Italy, Spain and Germany.

National judicial and law enforcement authorities

In **Spain**, *Juzgado Central de Instrucción nº 6 de la Audiencia Nacional, Fiscalía Especial Anticorrupcion y Contra la Criminalidad Organizada, Guardia Civil (UCO), Mossos d'Esquadra (UCAI, UCB and UCE).*

In **Italy**, *Procura Nazionale Antimafia ed Antiterrorismo, Procura della Repubblica Presso il Tribunale di Napoli, Direzione Distrettuale Antimafia (DDA), Guardia di Finanza (Nuclei di Polizia Tributaria di Napoli e Pisa).*